

Summer of 1898

Albertine Loomis

It was a landmark in Hawai'i's history—that summer of 1898. It was a time of endings and beginnings, of exuberant rejoicing and quiet sadness, of new hope and confidence and of reluctant relinquishing of old loyalties. It was the year of annexation.

Five summers had passed since the overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy, and three since the valiant but futile attempt to restore Lili'uokalani as queen. Yet in early 1898 the annexation treaty, eagerly ratified by the officials of the Republic of Hawaii, was quite unable to command a two-thirds vote of approval in the United States Senate. The joint resolution which took its place before Congress likewise languished, until many wondered what the final outcome would be.

But when America went to war with Spain in April, 1898, and hostilities quickly spread to the Pacific, it was evident that Hawai'i's future was bound irrevocably to that of the United States. The May Day entrance of Admiral Dewey into Manila Bay pushed the battle front almost five thousand miles to the west of the Islands. Coal piles along Honolulu's esplanade became worth their weight in gold. Hawai'i must choose between neutrality and alliance with the nation it long had hoped to join.

The decision was prompt and positive.¹ The Spanish minister's protests went unheeded. Telegrams to Washington followed one another as fast as steamers could carry them to San Francisco. (There was no cable then between Honolulu and the West Coast.) On April 12 Hawai'i offered to grant four extra coal-storage lots at the harbor's edge. On April 30 the Republic of Hawai'i proposed to deploy one hundred volunteers from the Hawai'i National Guard to fight in Cuba. On May 10 Hawai'i sent instructions to its representative in Washington to ascertain from the United States "what it wishes this Government to do in the way of assistance and special privileges," together with authority to "negotiate a treaty of alliance between the two governments."²

Albertine Loomis is a descendent of Elisha Loomis, first printer in Hawaii. A retired teacher of English, she has written several books on Hawaiian history.

The United States declined the one hundred volunteers "with regret" but accepted the storage privileges eagerly. The Navy purchased all the fuel in the Islands suitable for its use and dispatched loaded colliers to make Honolulu "the most important coaling station in the entire Pacific Ocean."³

In America the strategic importance of the Islands was now widely recognized. Annexationists in Congress came alive. A joint resolution for annexation, the Newlands Resolution, was brought before the House early in May; Speaker Reed, through his control of the Committee on Rules, blocked a vote until June 15; then the measure passed 209 to 91. Debate on the House-approved resolution began in the Senate on June 20. President McKinley brought all his influence to bear in favor of its passage, but a small number of anti-expansionists filibustered against it for sixteen days.

Meanwhile, Honolulu made ready to receive and entertain the sailors and soldiers en route to Manila.⁴ This was largely women's work. A committee of one hundred, authorized at a mass meeting, set about preparations, while their husbands passed the hat for the wherewithal to pay the bill. A plan to greet each service man with a *lei* was abandoned in favor of sending baskets of flowers on board. For each transport there was to be an elaborate floral piece, representing the United States flag with its forty-five stars. Chiefly, though, the task was to make ready the food: a ton of potato salad, twenty-five hundred pounds of roast beef, three hundred gallons of milk, ten thousand ham sandwiches, a hundred fifty pounds of coffee, eight hundred pineapples, eight hundred water melons, twenty thousand mangoes, five thousand oranges, two thousand pies, twenty bushels of cake, twelve thousand bottles of soda water and gingerale—so the ladies planned it; and if they failed to meet their quota in any item, there is no record of the shortage.⁵

The committee asked the government for an appropriation of \$10,000, and the government politely and regretfully refused. But the donations poured in. At Hobron's Drug Store the "Boys in Blue" subscription list lay on the counter and rapidly filled with signatures. Names of former royalists were not lacking, nor of Portuguese; and on one evening six Chinese—L. Ahlo, Wong Kwai, Lem Yip, Wong Leong, Sing Chong, and Y. Ahin—filing in with dignity, pledged a total of \$240.⁶

Private as well as public hospitality was proffered. As a preliminary gesture of good will "Uncle" George Lycurgus played host at his Sans Souci resort to three war correspondents on their way to the Philippines, inviting them to meet representatives of the English, Hawaiian, Japanese, and Chinese papers of Honolulu, to swim in the ocean, eat Hawaiian food at its finest, and listen to music by the Quintette Club.

The *Advertiser* for May 21 announced that daily from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Princess Ka'iulani and "Governor" Archibald Cleghorn would open the grounds at Ainalau, their Waikiki home, to the American visitors when they arrived. Three days later the paper reported that the "High Chiefess Mrs. Theresa Owana Wilcox," wife of Robert Wilcox, leader in the 1895 counter-revolution, would give a grand *lu'au* at Moanalua to welcome the "brave boys, the wearers of the red, white, and blue." The Kawanakoa princes, David and

Kuhio, arranged a *lu'au* for American officers. John F. Colburn, a member of Lili'uokalani's last cabinet but now an annexationist, made ready a feast for a group of visiting "notables." G. W. and E. C. Macfarlane offered the use of their Hawaiian Hotel on Hotel Street at Alakea. The Myrtle and Healani, rival yacht clubs, tendered their boat houses, and Long Branch resort at Waikiki all of its facilities.

Free transportation to Kapiolani Park and Waikiki was promised by Hawaiian Tramways, Inc. on their mule cars. Not one of the uniformed guests was to be allowed to pay for anything, not even for a cigarette or a haircut.⁷

The main festivities were to center in the 'Iolani Palace grounds, where tables would be spread under the trees, loaded with food and attended by Honolulu's most charming wives and daughters. A reviewing stand there must be—in front of the opera house, *makai* of Palace Square; on their way to refreshments the visiting lads would salute President Sanford B. Dole as he stood surrounded by other officials of the Republic of Hawaii and their families. And of course there must be speeches of welcome, whether anyone listened or not. Chief Justice Albert F. Judd, Cecil Brown, W. A. Kinney, and W. N. Armstrong—all vigorous annexationists—as well as Lili'uokalani's firm friend and loyal attorney, Paul Neumann, polished their paragraphs until they could not but dazzle the young patriots. Schools would be closed.

A little after four on the afternoon of June 1, five blasts from the whistle at the Hawaiian Electric Company told that Lookout Charlie Peterson at the Diamond Head signal station had sighted the first transport. Flags went up everywhere. In carriages and on foot people hurried to the wharves, and the week-long excitement began. The *City of Peking* erupted boys in uniform, shouting, "We want pie!" The streets choked, and the usually decorous town became a joyous bedlam. Then came the *City of Sydney* and after that the *Australia*, called into service in "this war for humanity." The four-page "Boys-in-Blue" edition of the *Advertiser* was printed in red ink above the fold and in blue below.⁸

All too soon the honored visitors climbed aboard, and the transports began steaming out of the harbor. Hundreds of Honoluluans waved frantically, screaming encouragement and "Aloha Oe" to the Manila-bound troops. The city cleaned up the trash, balanced its accounts, and resumed its quiet, orderly ways—until July 13. That was the day when the Pacific Mail steamship *Coptic* arrived off the port, signaling with flags: Annexation! The Newlands Resolution had passed both House and Senate, and President McKinley had signed it on July 7. Once again the streets along the waterfront filled with ecstatic men and women. The government band, led by Maestro Henry Berger, escorted the crowd from the wharf to the Palace grounds, where it played "The Star-Spangled Banner."⁹

Many Hawaiians stayed in their homes, either grieving for a glorious past, now gone forever, or trying to face the future with wistful optimism. But as Hawaiians they were to have their great day on August 2. That was when they welcomed Lili'uokalani home from the Mainland, where for a year and a half she had worked in vain to prevent annexation.¹⁰

It was past midnight when the *Gaelic's* approach was announced and *ali'i* and *maka'ainana* poured from their homes to hail the arrival of one they still called queen. Yet the throng on the esplanade was strangely silent as they watched Prince David Kawanakoa lead Lili'uokalani down the gangplank. Then as with one voice they returned her gentle "Aloha."

They followed her carriage to Washington Place, where they chanted and danced in her honor until dawn. As they watched Lili'uokalani enter her home, refresh herself with a light supper, and then receive some of her closest friends—all in full view through the open French doors—they saw, not a woman bitter and hostile in defeat, but one infinitely sad, yet gracious and loving, courageous and forgiving—one who still had hope for the future of Hawai'i.¹¹

Less than two weeks later, on August 12, came the brief, dignified ceremony of transferring sovereignty from the Republic of Hawai'i to the United States of America. Two U.S. warships, the *Philadelphia* and the *Mohican*, landed marines to join the Hawai'i National Guard just before noon in front of 'Iolani Palace (at that time officially called the Executive Building). On an improvised platform, handsomely decorated with red, white, and blue bunting, United States Minister to Hawai'i Harold M. Sewall read the annexation resolution, and white-haired, white-bearded Sanford B. Dole responded with a short speech, saying: "... I now, in the interest of the Hawaiian body politic and with full confidence in the honor, justice and friendship of the American people, yield up to you as the representative of the Government of the United States, the sovereignty and public property of the Hawaiian Islands."¹² In a few words Minister Sewall accepted the sovereignty. The bands—Hawai'i's government band and the one from the *Philadelphia*—played "Hawai'i Pono!" and the Hawaiian flag came down "like the fluttering of a wounded bird." Tears flowed, not only from Hawaiian but from *haole* eyes.

Then the thirty-six-foot "Old Glory" rose to the central tower and was caught by the breeze. The bands struck up "The Star-Spangled Banner," but for some members of the Hawaiian band this was just too much. Throwing down their instruments, they fled the scene, heart-broken. To be sure, they would, as time rolled on, return to their trumpets and trombones and, as members of the United States Government Band of Hawai'i, play on many a state occasion. They would play, too, to salute Lili'uokalani on her birthdays and, after nineteen years, at her funeral. But all this was in the tear-dimmed future; on this day in 1898 they could not foresee or believe in the healing that would come.

Exactly at noon a twenty-one-gun salute from the warships brought the ceremony to a close, and the new era in Hawaiian history began—not with cheers of victory, not with toasts and libations, but with quiet humility and fervent prayers.

That was the summer of 1898.

NOTES

- ¹ *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*. May 12, 1898.
- ² PCA, April 12 to May 10 1898, passim.
- ³ PCA, May 17, 18, and 27, 1898.
- ⁴ PCA, May 13 to June 3, 1898. Virtually every issue of the *Advertiser* between these dates ran an important story on this subject.
- ⁵ PCA, June 3, 1898, p. 5.
- ⁶ PCA, May 25, 1898, p. 2.
- ⁷ PCA, May 21, 1898.
- ⁸ PCA, June 3, 1898.
- ⁹ Damon, Ethel M., *Sanford Ballard Dole and His Hawaii* (Palo Alto, Ca., 1957), p.332.
- ¹⁰ Craft, Mabel Clare (Deering), *Hawaii Nei*, (San Francisco, 1899), pp. 93-98.
- ¹¹ PCA, August 13, 1898.
Damon, op.cit., pp. 333, 334.
- ¹² Lydecker, Robert C., *Roster Legislatures of Hawaii*, 1841-1918 (Honolulu, 1918), p. 252.